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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT — WEDNESDAY, March 22, 1929

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MYTHS ABOUT CLOTHES MOTHS." Information from Dr. E. A. Back, Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Mother Eve had plenty of trouble but she didn't have to worry about moth holes in her clothes. Clothes moths don't eat plant fabrics. That holds true for fig leaves as well as for our present-day cotton and linen and rayon materials. But way back when mankind first began using wool and fur and living in heated houses, the moths moved in and settled down to increase and multiply. Today they do damage each year to the tune of millions of dollars. They are in almost every dwelling no matter what the location. And thanks to modern heating, they can keep comfortably at work during the winter as well as the summer.

You might think that after all these years of living under the same roof, housewives would all be well acquainted with these troublesome pests. But that's far from the case. Every spring women spend a great deal of time and money battling moths with worthless weapons. Probably there are more false rumors, mistaken ideas and curious superstitions circulating about this one insect than all the other household pests put together.

You might think that housewives would at least know a moth when they see one. But over and over again they worry about the little white millers that flit around the lights in the evening thinking that they are clothes moths. Clothes moths are not attracted by light. They seek darkness. They fly lazily in darkened corners, or just beyond the range of bright light. When clothing or other objects are suddenly moved you can see them running rapidly or flying to conceal themselves in the folds of clothing, cracks or other dark places. The insect which looks like a moth but is flitting around the light has come in accidentally from outdoors and will do no damage to your clothes.

Most housekeepers understand that the parent moth -- the little flying moth -- does no eating. It is the tiny worm which hatches from the eggs laid by the flying moth that causes trouble. However, many housewives have the mistaken idea that it does no good to kill a flying moth, because moths never fly unless all their eggs have been laid. The entomologists have found this to be untrue. They advise killing a flying moth whenever you can.

One false but very common notion about moths is that certain odors will keep them away -- that moths don't like the smell of cedar, tar, lavender, tobacco, allspice, printing ink, and so on. So misguided housekeepers sprinkle dried lavender or cedar chips or spices on their clothes before packing them away.....a sad waste of time as far as moths are concerned. Or housekeepers hang their clothes in cedarized or tar paper bags when plain paper would be quite as much of a protection. Or they wrap clothes and blankets in newspapers in the mistaken belief that moths don't like the smell of newsprint. They even buy and hang in the closet little cans

of some strong-smelling substance advertised to "give off a protective fragrance." The entomologists say all these protections are worthless. Moths don't mind smells. There are certain vapors or gases that kill them but the smell has nothing to do with it. The smell of moth balls or napthlene flakes is not what makes them effective against moths. It's the vapor they give off as they evaporate that asphyxiates the insect. Such useful and inexpensive moth remedies as napthalene or paradichlorobenzene are only effective if you use enough and use it in a tight container so that the vapor will be concentrated and penetrate the fabrics inside.

Another mistaken notion is about the use of moth sprays. Many a housewife spends time and money going from closet to closet with a little hand-sprayer and shooting a little oily mist into the air in the belief that this will protect her clothes against moths. As a matter of fact, sprays on sale today kill only the insects that are hit or made wet.....kill only "on contact," as the entomologists say. If insects are on clothes and furniture and can be doused with the spray, they will die. And sprays are useful for getting into floor cracks and about baseboards especially power sprays.

Many people also have the idea that spraying will "moth proof" clothes. The entomologists explain that sprays consist largely of a high-grade odorless, stainless oil with pyrethrum or derris extracts dissolved in the oil. A moth that is on the garment but not hit by the spray, or one that happens on shortly after spraying can start eating at once. The spray has no effect on his appetite.

The good old remedies of careful airing, sunning, and brushing as well as laundering and dry cleaning, are still some of the best and cheapest ways to kill moths. Then, if you pack the clothes away immediately in a mothproof container along with a good supply of napthalene flakes, you should have no trouble.

If you want the facts about moths.....how to know them and their habits, and how to fight them effectively, write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for Leaflet No. 145 called "Clothes Moths."

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